



## **American Ambulance Association**

October 27, 2008

Public Service Commission  
Docketing Department  
101 Executive Center Drive  
Columbia, South Carolina 29210

### **DOCKET NUMBER 2007-445-A**

Members of the Public Service Commission:

The American Ambulance Association represents ambulance service providers throughout the United States. The association has several members that operate within South Carolina. We thank the commission for the opportunity to present these comments.

### **Comments on Proposed Regulations**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century health care environment in the United States, taxpayers and insurers alike constantly seek ways to reduce health care expenditures. The American Ambulance Association opposes the use of stretcher vans to transport patients and opposes Medicare reimbursement for stretcher van service. Our concerns with the proposed regulation are as follows:

1. In section 133(7)(A)(4) the text requires that an attendant in the rear of the vehicle with the patient "notify the driver of any sudden change in the patient's condition". By use of the term patient the commission is acknowledging that the person being transported has physical infirmity and is under the care of the attendant. There is no requirement within the rule that an attendant receive training in the recognition or treatment of medical emergencies. It is unsafe for a patient to be monitored by an untrained individual during medical transportation. Such an act increases the likelihood that serious or life threatening patient events will not be recognized, and if recognized will be improperly treated. Patients in need of stretcher transportation should be transported and monitored by certified Emergency Medical Technicians in a properly equipped ambulance.

2. In sections 133(7)(C)(a,d,e,and g) the regulation requires in part that:

*Stretcher van vehicles shall not be used:*

- a. To transport a passenger who requires medical monitoring.*
- d. To transport a person who needs or may need oxygen unless that person's physician has prescribed oxygen as a self-administered therapy.*
- e. To transport a passenger who needs or may need suctioning.*
- f. (omitted)*
- g. To transport a passenger who is experiencing an acute condition or the exacerbation of a chronic condition or a sudden injury or illness.*

Attendants meeting the requirements set forth in this proposed regulation are not required to complete any form of training that would prepare them to evaluate whether a passenger required medical monitoring, needed oxygen, or was experiencing an acute medical condition. The foundation of the national curriculum for the Emergency Medical Technician Basic is to teach and validate the skills required to make the assessments required in this proposed regulations. To permit, much less require, untrained and uncertified personnel to evaluate the medical condition of vulnerable patients with the foreknowledge that such lack of training will result in under diagnosis of serious medical conditions is clearly not in the interest of the public health. Combine inexperience and lack of training with the impetus from employers to maximize the number of transports, and the increase in unrecognized serious illness will rise precipitously. Patients in need of stretcher transportation should be cared for by trained and certified professionals with the skill to determine when a serious medical condition exists.

### **Additional Comments**

The AAA is opposed to this regulation because we believe it is not in the best interest of the patients being transported. Actual experience from across the nation makes it clear that patients are put at risk every day in transport vehicles not staffed or equipped to meet their medical needs. The AAA believes that every patient who needs to be in a stretcher during transport must have a medically trained EMT to attend to his or her medical health and safety needs. There is ambulance service and there is wheel chair transportation. Ambulances and wheel chair vans are very different. It is a misguided public policy to blur the distinction between medical care provided by ambulance services and transportation for people in wheel chairs.

The AAA also believes these patients require medical observation and handling by EMTs in a vehicle which is equipped with patient monitoring and management equipment. We also believe that some Medicare carriers have incorrectly

interpreted CMS guidelines when they deny these patients' claims. It is important to note that bed confined is a criterion for medical necessity.

Policies vary on this issue across the country. Some states such as Massachusetts, Michigan and Ohio have banned the use of stretcher vans because of patient handling and monitoring concerns. Other states allow this form of transportation under very strict regulation (such as California and Arkansas) or even in an unregulated fashion as in New York.

Some ambulance service providers have been forced to provide this type of service due to the reimbursement practices of some of the contracted Medicare carriers. Certain categories of patients get their claims denied due to lack of medical necessity with the carrier maintaining the patient could be transported safely by some other means. Typically these patients cannot tolerate sitting in a wheelchair during transport and are bed confined.

Conclusion:

The AAA believes that stretcher vans are an unsafe mode of transportation for patients, instead of safe regulated ambulance service. To allow use of stretcher vans will create a financial incentive to inappropriately place patients who need proper medical care and handling into a non-medical service at great potential risk to patient health. As a result, the AAA opposes the use of stretcher vans and opposes Medicare reimbursement for stretcher van service. We ask that the Public Service Commission carefully consider the real medical risks associated with stretcher van transportation and conclude that an ambulance is the only safe means to transport patients that require a stretcher.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Buell', with a stylized, cursive script.

James Buell  
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